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TAGS: PREL PGOV GG RS  
SUBJECT: RUSSIAN ONLINE OPINIONS LARGEY ANTI-AMERICAN,  
PRO-RUSSIA

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Minister-Counselor Alice Wells, for reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) An analysis of Russian blogs and online fora on the South Ossetia conflict showed large resentment towards U.S. policy, and approval of Russia's handling of the conflict. However, a few online contributors spoke critically of Russia's military operations in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, contending that Russia was using too much force. These online opinions appear to indicate continued support of Russia's participation in the conflict. End summary.

Anti-US Statements Abundant

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¶2. (C) Online discussions on the South Ossetian conflict in many cases turned into fora for contributors to vent their frustration with U.S. policies, both past and present. These anti-U.S. comments, found on nearly all of the online Russian fora that we looked at, generally fall into two camps. First, people found the U.S. hypocritical, questioning how the U.S. could criticize Russia when the U.S. had intervened in Iraq and Afghanistan. Second, contributors lamented the U.S. using a "double-standard," criticizing Russia for moving its troops into Georgia, and not in turn criticizing Georgia for moving its troops into South Ossetia and causing more destruction than Russian troops.

¶3. (SBU) Some blogs contained cartoons depicting Georgian President Saakashvili as a U.S. puppet or dressed in a stars and stripes suit. Contributors to news stories on Russian humanitarian aid to South Ossetia were critical that the U.S. had not offered any assistance to the victims, citing other conflicts or natural disasters where the U.S. had quickly assisted. Furthermore, roughly sixty percent of the anti-U.S. comments that we saw blamed the United States for Georgia's incursion into South Ossetia, contending that the U.S. either: 1) trained and equipped Georgian forces for this purpose; 2) gave the go-ahead to Saakashvili to attack South Ossetia; or 3) did not intervene because it approved of Saakashvili's actions. One August 11 Newsru.com article linked to by several bloggers even went so far as to suggest that a 2001 Tom Clancy-inspired American video game bore striking similarities to the current conflict, being suspiciously set in the year 2008, and only reaching victory for the game player when U.S. and NATO troops came in and rescued Georgia from the Russians.

Only a Few Popular Voices Critical of Russia

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¶4. (SBU) While the majority of Russian blogs and fora continued to be filled with pro-Russian comments, a few voices emerged that were critical of Russia and Russia's media portrayal of the conflict. One popular livejournal.ru contribution by Boris Veshnevskiy that was posted on Yabloko's website and other sites argued that Georgia's actions did not justify Russia's armed forces entering the

territory of a sovereign state, especially "since Russia's 58th army did not have a peacekeeping mandate from CIS countries or the United Nations." Furthermore, he said that Russians previously granted citizenship to South Ossetians and Abkhazians purposefully "to create a pretext for intervention at any moment convenient to the Russian government."

15. (SBU) Echo Moskvy staff blogger Anton Orekh commented that while Russia could be seen as in the right for entering South Ossetia and protecting Russian citizens from harm, Russia's preemptive movement of troops into Abkhazia makes it clearly look like the aggressor. He said that the Abkhaz army--which is better equipped than the South Ossetians -- may decide on its own to start aggressions, and because Russia has already moved its troops in, it will be immediately blamed for being the aggressive party regardless of how the conflict began.

#### **Eyewitness Accounts**

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16. (SBU) Bloggers identifying themselves as eyewitnesses described the situation in South Ossetia. A Russian journalist in the region said that neither Georgian nor Russian newscasts are accurately capturing the gross loss of life and property in South Ossetia. A young Tshkinvali man said he had heard through a relative that Georgian troops had beheaded unarmed women and children in his South Ossetian town. A young South Ossetian woman said that her family had remained in their basement for three days, only to come up and find that nearly their whole neighborhood was destroyed and several loved ones were killed.

17. (SBU) Alan Tskhurbayev, a Russian journalist who contributed to an August 11 story for England's The Guardian, interviewed South Ossetian refugees who crossed over to Alagir, North Ossetia. On his blog, he quoted a Tshkinvali resident saying that, "All the world shouts that the bombardment of Georgia is awful, but to bomb Tshkinvali is not awful?" Tskhurbayev also blogged that Russian troops passing through the border into South Ossetia told him on August 11 that they were advancing all the way to Gori in order to create a "buffer zone" between Georgian forces and South Ossetia.

#### **Comment**

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18. (C) The opinions of Russian bloggers and forum contributors largely correlated with those of the opinions expressed in the press; critical and distrustful of the U.S., approving of Russia's military actions, and concerned about the plight of South Ossetian residents. Over the past few days, bloggers that oppose Russian policies have slightly increased in number, but it is still unlikely that the online community -- much like the public at large -- will change its steadfast support for Russia's tough engagement with Georgia in South Ossetia.

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